

Shenandoah

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Russell Kirk

ENGLISH LETTERS IN THE AGE OF BOREDOM

Some day I shall write a book with the title *The Age of Eliot*. The span of Mr. T. S. Eliot's life, extending from the ascendancy of President Cleveland and Lord Salisbury to our present troubled hour, has been characterized by as much material change as any age in the whole of history; and this alteration of society and the very face of the world has been paralleled by a profound change in the realm of letters, and that not a change for the better. When Mr. Eliot was a boy, the great Victorians still thundered, and American letters ranged all the way from Henry Adams to Mark Twain. Since then, much of the virtue has gone out of English and American literature. The English literary world suffers from the disease of acedia, the American from the disease of concupiscence; and both these maladies, I believe, are at once symptoms and products of a deep-seated boredom.

Mr. Eliot's literary career has been a protest against the causes of this boredom. The terror of the *Wasteland* is life without purpose. Mr. Eliot himself is not bored; he has resources that transcend the follies of the time; but I take him for the central figure of our time, in letters, because he describes this condition of social and private acedia with a high and gloomy power. Indeed, he was one of the first to give the malady its name: see his essay on Marie Lloyd, written in 1923. I select as the most striking spirit of the age, then, a man of letters quite out of harmony with his time; nor is this mere perversity. Samuel Johnson was opposed to the great currents of his age; so was Cicero.

It is quite within the realm of possibility that the Age of Eliot will be succeeded by a long gulf of vacancy in the history of literature, rather as after Ausonius followed the night. Universal war and social dissolution might bring this calamity upon us, a dismal prospect; and yet the calamity may come in a fashion still worse—I mean the degeneration of letters into the condition of mere mass-propaganda, for the ends of the impersonal and conscienceless mass-state. I think it would be better, if the choice could be made, for society to be dissolved into its constituent atoms than for the society to become one featureless bulk of production-men and consumption-men, whose reading, such as it might be, would come from the typewriters of the miserable creatures who sit, alternately listless and trembling, at the tables in the Chestnut Tree Cafe of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. Having no literature is better than having degenerate literature. Far from being a fantastic vaticination, this latter eventuality is soberly contemplated by a wise and witty editor, Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge:

A recurrent nightmare, with me, is that in our inimitable English way we are allowing a servile State to come to pass of itself without our noticing it; that one morning I shall wake up and find that, with the Monarchy still extant, Honourable and Right Honourable Members still meeting in Westminster, the *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, the *New Statesman* and the *Spectator* and *Punch* still regularly appearing, the cricket still being played at Lords, and the B.B.C. still providing its daily offering from "Bright and Early" to "Good-night everyone, good-night," we have nevertheless become a totalitarian society. In this nightmare it seems clear that all the faceless men, the men without opinions, have been posted in key positions for a bloodless take-over, and that no one is prepared to join a Resistance Movement in defense of freedom because no one remembers what freedom means. The walls of Jericho fell down, not because the trumpet blast was strong, but because the walls themselves were crumbling. People, that is to say, are never enslaved unless they have become slaves already. They swim into the Great Leviathan's mouth. He does not need to chase them.

A subtle statesman now coming back into his own, Prince Metternich, remarked near the end of his career that states fall only when they have lost faith in themselves. Boredom, the

condition of the "indifferents" in Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* and in Rowntree's and Laver's *English Life and Leisure*, in essence is the product of a conviction that life is not worth living. Such boredom does not rise up from the proletariat like a miasma from the mud: it is as fallacious to make the proletarians the villains of the modern tragedy as it is to pretend that the proletarians are the heroes. Social boredom in part is produced by a pattern of life (which in one my age may be caused by industrialism, and in some other age by different factors), and in part by the ideas which men hold about themselves. Both causes of boredom descend upon the masses from above. The ordinary man can conceive of no way of life substantially different from that in which he happens to find himself, and so accepts boredom, if it is the pattern of his age, without articulate protest; the ordinary man takes his ideas from the leading minds of his time or of the time just preceding, though those ideas filter down to him only gradually and in vulgarized form. So if the disease of acedia oppresses the great mass of men, the blame, after all, lies with the shapers of national destinies and the philosophers in the Academy. Nature does indeed imitate art. The realm of letters is not a reflection of the mood of society: it is a principal cause and forerunner of the mood of society. With the greatest misgivings, then, I have been prying into the fatigued state of mind which glows dully out of a great part of modern literature. I have been trying to discern by what processes this fatigue of spirit is communicated to the multitude, and by what processes a bored society, in turn, blunts the sensibilities of its literary men.

Let me say here, before I go further into this trouble, that I am not advocating "social consciousness" in the novel, or Marxian theories of literature as an instrument of social control, or Benthamite notions of the "utility" of books. We have had altogether too bitter a dose of those specifics in these past few decades. It is my conviction that the end of literature is the elevation and pleasurable exercise of the private reason, not the manipulation of men in the mass. I am examining the relationship between modern letters and modern society, in my ineffectual way, with an eye to the salvation of both; but though the two are intricately bound

up together, still I think that letters and society, like church and state, ought to be distinct entities—mutually respectful, yet never confounded in one ponderous corporation. My master in these matters is Coleridge, who combined his genius for private fancy with a wonderful understanding of the problems of society. Coleridge did not try to make *The Ancient Mariner* into a tract for the times: he wrote that poem simply out of an awe for the mystery which envelops human life at all times, and out of a love for the beauties of the English language. But Coleridge, knowing that private imagination and private contentment flourish only in a decent society, was also the author of *Lay Sermons*, a work of Tory politics upon the highest plane of politics. The author ought not to be the servant of the society in which he finds himself; but he ignores the tendency of that society only at his own terrible peril.

Now I have no intention of examining the whole question of literature and social boredom just now: that subject requires a book, and more than one book. What I propose to do here is to offer some comments upon the present state of letters in England in relation to the temper of English society at this hour. I have spent a good deal of time talking with all sorts of people in Britain, and I subscribe to most of the serious English journals, and I try to keep up with the more important works of fiction and polemic and even statistics which are being published in London nowadays. The general subject is quite as important here in the United States. If I were to discuss the American aspects of this problem, I should pay especial attention to the cult of violence in fiction; to the decay of the old-fashioned yarn in the popular magazines, and its replacement by boy-and-girl-flirtation stories; to the gulf between the critical quarterlies and the popular press; to the triumph of the comic-book and all those abominations of the printed page which Mr. Geoffrey Wagner describes in his *Parade of Pleasure*; to the unhealthy dreariness and empty introspection of aspiring young writers from "P.S. 149" as represented in anthologies like *Discovery* and *New Voices*; to the sour disillusion of the contributors to *Partisan Review*. But I return to my immediate concern, the state of letters in the United Kingdom.

Most serious students of English letters today seem to find that

literature does not much flourish in modern Britain; and this decline has two principal aspects: a dearth of important writers, and a dearth of intelligent readers. I do not desire to exaggerate. The standard of serious journalism remains as high in Britain as anywhere in the world; a large number of well-written and intelligent books is published every year; and the really educated public, per head of population, is larger than the same body in the United States. In America, any book of which more than ten thousand copies are sold is considered remarkably successful; in Britain, a sale of five thousand copies is similarly remarkable; but, total population taken into account, this ratio is to the advantage of Britain. British book-shop counters are not covered with books translated from other languages, as in Italy, nor are serious critical journals withered away almost to extinction, as in Sweden. Yet the symptoms of a melancholy decay of letters are unmistakable. I propose to examine the first matter of a dearth of readers.

A large public for serious literature existed for about a century in Britain; and that period coincides closely with what is often called "the liberal era," extending from the end of the Napoleonic Wars to the beginning of the First World War. The first author whose books were sold to a large public at a low price was Walter Scott; the last—why, possibly we may see the last such authors in our own time, and already authors have ceased to exercise any such influence as Scott did. This period of the serious reading public was the age of the great middle-class ascendancy. Before that time, the country-house patron and the wealthy subscriber to small editions of expensive books kept the man of letters in pocket; and earlier still, of course, the patron of literature had been the Church. Nowadays, as influence and wealth of the middle classes (in the true meaning of that somewhat amorphous term) contract, it is the modern proletariat—I use this latter term not for commination, but as the most nearly satisfactory label for the condition of man in what Sir Osbert Sitwell calls our dreary "proletarian cosmopolis" that dominates modern society—which has patronage to bestow upon letters. And that modern publicity generally prefers to spend its *l. s. d.* for the greater good of Woolworth and Guinness and Rothermere.

One index to the decay of serious reading is the fate of the magazines of opinion, criticism, and respectable leisure. These have been going down the track to dusty death since 1914, and more sharply since 1937. I need not dwell upon the demise of the *Mercury*, *Life and Letters*, and other such journals; they have been gone for more than a decade, and have not been replaced. I need hardly mention the extinction of *Criterion*, *Horizon*, and *Scrutiny*, on a somewhat different plane. The process is now accelerated: during the past two years, for instance, *World Review* and *The Fortnightly* have ceased to be. Only a few months ago, the most interesting of the newer reviews, *The Cambridge Journal*, came to an end. The survivors, like *Twentieth Century* and *The Dublin Review* and *The Contemporary Review* and *The Month*, do not have easy sledding. As for the serious weeklies, they hold out somewhat more successfully, but consolidation or elimination afflict them, too: the *Guardian*, the only serious Anglican weekly, went under two years ago, and *Time and Tide*, *The Spectator*, and *The New Statesman and Nation* contend fearfully against increased costs of production and distribution. Among the magazines of decent fiction and the essay, the *Cornhill*, last of an old breed is reduced from monthly to quarterly publication; the most recent venture, *The London Magazine*, is not very lively; while more specialized recent undertakings like *History Today* fight against the current. The universities possess no equivalent of the critical journals published by American colleges.

Nor have the serious reviews been replaced by more popular decent publications. *The Strand*, last of the mass-audience monthlies of some repute, has expired after various twists and turns; *John Bull* and such periodicals are on a level lower than that of the *Saturday Evening Post*. One of the principal expectations of Victorian champions of the democratic dogma was that free and compulsory schooling would give to literature an immense new public of persons intent upon intellectual self-improvement. This has not come to pass. Late in the nineteenth century, five or six weekly magazines intended to bring literary culture to the masses were established; but they flourished for scarcely more than a generation; as literacy became general, it ceased to be prized. The

last survivor among these publications, *John o' London's Weekly*, gave up the ghost only a few months ago. The mass public of England reads, instead, *News of the World* and the *Daily Mirror*. Half a century ago, the new illustrated weeklies were viewed with alarm by some critics, who saw in them a formidable threat to serious reading. Well, we have got far beyond that stage now, so that the older picture-weeklies, like *The London Illustrated News* and *The Sphere*, are become bulwarks of literary taste. The newer picture-weeklies, however, are inferior to *Life*, and the news-magazine like *Time* or *Newsweek* has not succeeded in establishing itself in England. As the media for expression of thought decay or expire, the parlor-tables in British hotels are covered with a new spawn of trade-journals and automobile-company magazines, luxuriously printed, fat and glossy, published out of the ample advertising-funds of the great stock-companies. A mad world, my masters. The average Englishman reads nothing except a thin and vulgar daily newspaper, though he has been compelled to go to school for half a century; while in Portugal, the state with the highest rate of illiteracy in western Europe, the reading of serious books and journals, per head of population, is much higher than in enlightened Britain. The broad nineteenth-century public for English literature, in short has very nearly ceased to exist.

Now what of the writers of modern Britain? Some three years ago, while the Attlee government still held power, an English editor of equalitarian opinions, travelling in America, happened to lecture at a state college on the condition of English writing. He was well pleased with that condition, for the most part, though he confessed to a slight uneasiness at the lack of talent in the rising generation. And it was true enough, he agreed, that the leading poet and critic, Mr. Eliot, was really an American; that many of the most interesting novelists and poets, like Laurens van der Post and Roy Campbell, also were not really English; that some of the most influential writers, like Sir Osbert Sitwell and Robert Henriques, were dismayed at the state of both English letters and English society. Moreover, he reflected, no one seemed much interested in new directions in literature. But all this, he concluded, was the result of a great social contentment, brought about by the wel-

fare state: all classes were so satisfied with life that there was no strain and struggle to provoke men into writing and reading. All the battles had been won; the earthly paradise was at hand.

At this juncture, an elderly American professor of English literature arose and inquired, very modestly, "Are there any wits among modern English writers?"

The editor was taken aback; he pondered; at length he came forth with the name of John Betjeman; but the subject appeared rather to disquiet him, and perhaps he was not sorry when the question-period was concluded. That question, indeed, however innocently intended, was fatal to his thesis. For satire and irony are the only corners of the old realm of letters which remain popular and prosperous in Britain at present; and these redoubts are garrisoned by Tories, who hold the terrestrial paradise of collectivistic Britain in a profound contempt. It is sufficient merely to mention the names of Evelyn Waugh, Malcolm Muggeridge, Wyndham Lewis, Sir Max Beerbohm, Osbert Lancaster, C. S. Lewis, and John Betjeman. Some of these writers are more than wits, and Mr. Wyndham Lewis is not, strictly speaking, a Tory; yet their principal influence has been satirical, and they all dread and detest the age of collectivism. The spirit of Juvenal thus scourges the naked follies of the time, in Britain; the terrible whip of irony, snatched from the hands of the socialists and apostles of progress, now gives to English letters most of what vigor is to be found in recent writing.

Satire dominates letters in an age of decay and boredom. Very often it is the instrument of the old order, moral and social, against the triumphant and vulgar new order. For satire to have meaning, the vices of the ascendant forces in society must contrast forcibly with the accepted, or at least traditional, principles of morality. Even in the Rome of Petronius, a sufficient residue of taste and principle remained for the purposes of irony; even in the Enlightenment, sufficient sense of justice remained for Voltaire to make a mock of the age of phantasms and buckram masks. Mr. Wyndham Lewis argues that true satire cannot flourish in our time because men no longer repair to accepted standards of morality by which the monstrous and the ridiculous may be judged; and it seems true that satire wakes to life at a certain stage of social

decay, but loses its power to move men after that decay has progressed yet further. Whether or not the work of these writers is true satire, at any rate they have turned their wit against the grand assumption of the men who advocate an equalitarian and collectivistic society, from their melioristic secularism to their notion of economic justice. The terrestrial paradise, Bellamy-style, seems to the leading writers of the time to be intolerably boring and base.

Now a literary period which experiences a startling decline of the serious reading-public, which confesses to decay of the vigor and influence of writers, and which (within its diminished confines) is dominated by satirists and wits who belabor the age mercilessly, seems to be suffering from some serious affliction. I am inclined to think that this ailment, in considerable part, is ennui, world-weariness, social boredom. I think that literature has had a part in bringing this boredom to society, and that society has had an even greater part in afflicting literature with this curse of *acedia*. I do not think that either society or letters can cure itself unaided. Yet I think that hope remains, though it is chastening to recall that the last malady which flew out of Pandora's box was *delusory* hope. I do not yet agree with Mr. Whittaker Chambers' conclusion that it is idle to talk about preventing the wreck of Western civilization. "It is already a wreck from within," Mr. Chambers says. "That is why we can hope to do little more now than snatch a fingernail of a saint from the rack or a handful of ashes from the faggots, and bury them secretly in a flower-pot against the day, ages hence, when a few men begin again to dare to believe that there was once something else, that something else is thinkable, and need some evidence of what it was, and the fortifying knowledge that there were those who, at the great nightfall, took loving thought to preserve the tokens of hope and truth." Much in modern letters seems to sustain Mr. Chambers' diagnosis; yet the fact that, in Britain at least, it still is possible to face satirically the follies of the time—this fact encourages me to believe that some standards of judgment remain to us, and therefore some opportunities for regeneration.

Regeneration, literary or material, is possible only when the causes of an affliction have been properly apprehended. People

who hope for a renewed vigor in English and American letters need, then, to ascertain just how far the present apparent lassitude in the world of literature really is the product of social boredom, and what are the conditions that have brought such boredom into being. We ought not to exaggerate. Reading in the sense of mere amusement, for instance, seems to have decayed among us rather because of the rise of new amusements—principally automobiles, television, radio, and motion-pictures—than because of more subtle social influences (though automobiles, television, radio, and motion-pictures, once their initial charm has departed, may become direct causes of boredom and at the same time may have permanently alienated people from the printed page.) But there is much more to the decay of reading habits, and to the decay of vigor and purpose in writing, than this. Mr. Eliot observes that he finds it difficult to read the novels published nowadays. He is scarcely alone in this: something is wrong with the novelist, as well as the novelist's public. The two of them, it seems to me, are even more bored with art than with life.

Literature thrives in an age of variety; it sickens in a time of uniformity. And it seems to me that we have been working with a perverse will to reduce our civilization to an equalitarian uniformity. The consequences are remarked by Mr. Lionel Trilling, in the concluding pages of *The Liberal Imagination*, when he writes that for contemporary liberal-democratic writing we obtain little to establish in our minds and affections; nor do we return to such writing. "The sense of largeness, of cogency, of the transcendence which largeness and cogency can give, the sense of being reached in our secret and primitive minds—this we virtually never get from the writers of the liberal democratic tradition at the present time." In Europe, the leading writers of the age reject the dogmas of liberalism and democracy, Mr. Trilling says: "For it is in general true that the modern European literature to which we can have an active, reciprocal relationship, which is the right relationship to have, has been written by men who are indifferent to, or even hostile to, the tradition of democratic liberalism as we know it. Yeats and Eliot, Proust and Joyce, Lawrence and Gide—these men

do not seem to confirm us in the social and political ideals which we hold."

Elsewhere, Mr. Trilling has advanced the theory that the principal theme of important novels is the relationship between individuals of different classes, with all the complexities which a sense of class, of duty, and of aspiration bring. It is not necessary for us to subscribe fully to this theory when we recognize the importance of social variety to a vigorous literature; yet I think there is much truth in Mr. Trilling's remarks. Sir Harold Nicholson recently touched upon a similar matter when he wrote that the great age of the novel was the century of middle-class ascendancy, during which the reading public—that is, the educated middle classes—feeling secure in a world of solid facts, enjoyed the novel as a realm in which the dramatic or unexpected or improbable contrasted with the confident reality which they perceived all about them. But nowadays the catastrophes of our real world, in which the middle-class reading public is perilously adrift, put fiction to shame, and the fascination is gone out of the novel; the novelist himself is overwhelmed by a sense of the pettiness of his craft in the face of tragic reality.

These theses deserve a detailed criticism which I cannot give them here. I do venture to suggest, however, that Mr. Trilling's and Sir Harold Nicholson's ideas go far to establish the fact of close relationship between the condition of a society and the quality of that society's literature. It is my conviction that the present tendencies of society, supposing they continue unchecked, will put an end to elevated literature. The culmination of the equalitarian dogmas will repress that proliferating variety among individuals and classes which stimulates the imaginative writer and gives him an inquiring public. The triumph of an unfeeling technology, of the sort Mr. Friedrich Juenger describes in *The Failure of Technology*, will impose upon the human mind a boredom and lassitude probably unequalled in any previous age of decadence. The decay of religious faith will make men ask again that persistent question, "Is life worth living?"—and make them answer it in the negative. When life is not worth living, it is not worth writing about. I do not say that these things are inevitable; I say merely

that they are all too possible, and that the student of English letters and society can perceive an ominous progress toward such an end—a progress which continues to gain momentum. A literature which is the intricate creation of seven centuries may be effaced in a generation or two.

Men read and write only because they are convinced that certain great subjects are worth reading and writing about. Four great themes, it seems to me, have been the inspiration of most important imaginative literature from the dawn of Greek civilization down to our own age. The first of these is religion: the description of the relation between divine nature and human nature, as in Hesiod and Dante and Milton. The second is heroism: the nobility of strong and earnest men, as in Homer or Virgil or Malory. The third is love: the devotion beyond mere appetite, as in classical legend or medieval romance. The fourth is the intricacy of character and class, ranging all the way from Chaucer to Conrad. Now a society which has lost its religious convictions and its piety denies itself the first theme. A society which denies the right to greatness and to distinctions among men deprives itself of the second theme. A society which takes love for no more than the carnal appetite cannot attach real significance even to the novel of adultery. A society which looks upon men as mere production-and-consumption units of interchangeable value cannot understand the subtle shadings of personality and rank of a different sort of age. The springs of the imagination thus are dried up. For a time, satire can exist by pointing out the decay of faith and heroism and love and variety; but when even the memory of these themes fades, then satire, too, comes to an end. Then boredom triumphs in life and in art.

Imaginative literature is not the whole realm of letters. History, biography, and criticism, together with philosophy and theology and the sciences, to some extent remain independent of the sources for fiction in poetry and prose—though not wholly independent. Most imaginative writers, indeed, derive their postulates from the preacher, the scholar, and the chronicler. We may take some comfort, then, from the present revival of serious writing and reading in this other province of the realm of letters. People in England do

still read Mr. C. S. Lewis and Mr. Arnold Toynbee: historical and moral speculation, indeed, enjoy today a vogue unequalled since late Victorian times. As thinking men become aware of the advances of social boredom, they turn to knowledge of the past and to a re-examination of the ethical life in search of remedies. It may be that the poet and the novelist, in the next decade or the next generation, will take their tone from the resurgent scholarly speculation of the present hour. That speculation does not leave religion, heroism, love, and social variety out of account. As Dante made the arguments of the Schools into great poetry, or as Scott metamorphosed the principles of Burke into the novel, so the poets and novelists of the latter half of the twentieth century may find purpose in existence through the inquiring scholarship of this day; and those new works of poetic imagination, in turn, may help to convince the mass of men that life has more in it than mere gratification of appetite and acquisition of creature-comforts.

Reading books cannot of itself make a man whole. The bulk of humanity is affected only indirectly and slowly by the tone and temperature of letters. Purposeful work, the restoration of a sense of duty, and a state and an economy in which the individual is something more than a consumer or a machine-tender are indispensable to any enduring defense against general boredom. Yet letters may point the way; and any society which is regaining the conviction that life is something more than mere subsistence will provide a public for the imaginative writer. When we begin to recognize the claims of true leisure—as opposed to mere idleness or amusement—then we may think twice before imposing a condition of dead-level equality upon society; when writers begin to perceive afresh the reality of faith and heroism and love and personality, then their natural public will give them a hearing. Our legacy of English letters is very great; our dead authors give us life; and loyalty to life and art, luckily, dies very hard, even in the domination of Giant Boredom.

Donald Davie

At the Cradle of Genius

"Not the least enviable of your many gifts,
Being indeed (what seems unfair) implied
In that first bargain, genius, are two
Appurtenances or corollaries:
One which we hope you do not recognize
Or else it halves its value, one we hope you do
By the same token; and we mean
Charm in the first place, in the second
A narrowing of the choice of destinies.

For character may be fate, and yet vocation
(Differing from the casual gift, a flair)
Can so subsume the variants under types
That, all the issues coming clear,
The gift becomes of nothing else but freedom,
The only kind that you enjoy,
The recognition of a limitation
An idiosyncrasy, a choice
That, being narrow, can be seen as free."

Thus your first fairy godmother, I suppose,
A learned, solemn, even a pedantic lady,
Edwardian resident of Bruges and Rome
Where she pursues her out-of-date researches
Into "The Natural History" (save the mark)
"Of Genius." Now I hear her sister,
The junior counsel but the cleverer,
Though in the plural, yet in others terms, address you
Not altogether to the same effect:

"The benefits that are at my discretion are
Particularizings of the general scope
This lady has endowed you with; and first,

Although a flair is of another order
Than what we give, yet as no spectacle
Is more to be pitied than one who has
The genius, or to speak more properly
The temperament, and no aptitude, we give
Inalienable technical command.

Then, for your freedom: it is absolute.
Your law unto yourself is absolute
That you be lawless. Since you have no choice
(My colleague's paradox) you have
Absolute choice. Exceptionally fated
To break all rules, you are to find the rules
Of art and conduct waived. The moral law
Lapses before the selfless man, possessed
Of no one self, but of and by a style."

"Not that you have," the first impetuously
Resuming cried, "no duty to be pure . . ."
"In heart," I fear she would have said; but here
The modern muse broke in on her with "Pure,
Purged of all bearing on a human need,
The truest poem's at most a golden standish,
A tray to put your pens in." Then a murmur
That swelled beneath the voices broke
Into a shout excluding all the muses.

It was the chorus of the acclamation lately
Accorded you as legendary hero,
Dilating on your prodigality,
Your arrogance, your abandonment, your art,
Though that seemed incidental. In the din
I caught by starts the sisters crying still,
And once the elder sounded menacing:
"Some have enjoyed what here I deny to you,
A self-betrayal not betrayed in art."

The Mushroom Gathers

After Mickiewicz

Strange walkers! See their processional
Perambulations under low boughs,
The birches white, and the green turf under.
These should be ghosts by moonlight wandering.

Their attitudes strange: the human tree
Slowly revolves on its bole. All around
Downcast looks; and the direct dreamer
Treads out in trance his lane, unwavering.

Strange decorums: so prodigal of bows,
Yet lost in thought and self-absorbed, they meet
Impassively, without acknowledgment.
A courteous nation, but unsociable.

Field full of folk, in their immunity
From human ills, crestfallen and serene.
Who would have thought these shades our lively friends?
Surely these acres are Elysian Fields.

ah

Desmond Stewart

Damon's Epitaph

In their assessive sorrow
Almost unanimous:
"His work has little, some lascivious phrases,
A morbid light through a tangled hedgerow."
And with these words he was dismissed
To the back shelves in the comprehensive backroom.
No need to pursue the inquest:
Desire of fame dies in the tomb.
They did not say: "What else could a poet turn to?
But to the last exile
In lips and eyes and the hotel bedroom."
They omitted from their file:
"It was not the time to be Byron,
Singing of freedom and Greece,
When the growing laurel was cut,
When the wreath was lifted from Homer, and put
On the bald brow of a manicured tyrant.
Then was the time for slim Catullus
To think only of keys
And coins and hold-door perils
And dawn's depressing colours."

iends?

Harvey Wheeler

RUSSELL KIRK AND THE NEW CONSERVATISM

I. Romanticism and Politics

The most difficult thing to explain about the works of Russell Kirk¹ is their great popularity. Americans as conservatives are supposed to lean toward the Andrew Carnegie, Chamber of Commerce type of conservatism most often associated with the late Robert A. Taft. Yet here is a "new" conservatism which explicitly disavows this part of the American conservative tradition. Instead there is advocated a metaphysical theocracy to be managed by a romantic land-based aristocracy. It is hard to imagine a more infelicitous and foredoomed political theory. The foreseeable American future seems to promise a fantastic electronic, nuclear, servomechanistic society led by a bureaucratic gerontocracy. Kirk responds by seriously offering us the political theory of the Waverley Novels. It helps a little to point out that the new conservatism provides a political extension of the *Waste Land* reaction, but the puzzle remains. For Eliot was free to be politically irresponsible, whereas Kirk asks that his political theory be taken seriously. And, as this is exactly what the present generations of young Americans has done, their reaction demands explanation.

Harvard's Louis Hartz has recently reminded us that American culture has been unrelievedly middle-class and that its political theory has been undeviatingly "liberal," intending by that word the same meaning conveyed by the phrase western liberal democracy. Yet Russell Kirk's new conservatism has almost as feudal a spirit as the nineteenth-century romantic reaction upon which it draws. To understand the new conservatism requires understanding

¹Randolph of Roanoke, Chicago, 1951; *The Conservative Mind*, Chicago (Regnery), 1953; *A Program for Conservatives*, Chicago (Regnery), 1954; *Academic Freedom*, Chicago (Regnery), 1955.

how cultures, and especially our middle-class culture, can produce and adopt self-abnegating literary and political traditions. Probably all romanticism is best understood as a middle class ideological expression. This seems to have been true of previous romanticisms—the Hellenistic and the Roman as well as the great European romantic outpouring of the nineteenth century.

Another brief comparison is useful. Almost every conservative in Russell Kirk's story began as a young radical and became a romantic conservative only later in life. In nineteenth-century England we know that there was at work something more fundamental than fear of the rationalism of Rousseau or disgust over the excesses of Thermidor. In addition to the official oppression described by Bertram Sarason there was the national threat to England of Napoleonic imperialism. These, more than the seamy biography of the Goddess of Reason, rang the changes of England's intellectuals from youthful radicalism to romantic conservatism. Similarly, our own romantic new conservatism builds its myth out of a rejection of the rationalism of the New Deal. Yet it draws its visceral stamina out of the permeation throughout our culture of effects which have accompanied our Cold War to resist the contemporary threat of Soviet imperialism. Romanticism in both cases has issued in a kind of political narcosis. It has put politics into cold storage, channeling the mind away from concern with solving human problems into concern with esthetic and metaphysical problems. Spiritual esthetics and political anesthetics have tended to go together in romanticism, as they tend to go together also in the conservatism of Russell Kirk.

II. *The Recesses of the Conservative Mind*

The Conservative Mind—from Burke to Santayana is an historically important book, but not in the way it claims. For it is not an important contribution to the history of political theory. It is sophisticated and erudite. It is written by a man of obvious delicacy of taste and poetry of spirit. But it does not add greatly to our knowledge or insight about any one of the multitude of political theorists treated. The absence of fresh interpretative synthesizing—

though this is precisely the claim of the book—is most noticeable in the pages on Calhoun. Here certainly is a keystone figure. Interpretations of American political theory, liberal and conservative alike, will stand or fall on their treatment of Calhoun. He demands considerable rigor of analysis and interpretation before being fitted into the Burkean tradition announced as the guiding principle of organization and selection in the *Conservative Mind*. Kirk does not satisfy this demand.

Although every writer chooses his own grounds of battle, the choices must be defensible. When his struggle is over reviewers must go back over the terrain for evidences of possible mischoices affecting the outcome. Granting that no two scholars would tell the same story of the Burkean tradition each completed story must stand on its own self-evident merits. One of Kirk's most serious troubles seems to be the way he delimits the Burkean tradition. It is distinguished first from English constitutional conservatism and then immunized from European idealist and sociological conservatism.

Yet Burke's great competence lay in constitutional problems. His chief occupation was that of constitutional analyst. His recognition of the role of modern political parties as integral constitutional institutions was one of his primary claims to fame prior to the new conservatism. On this foundation has been built a well recognized and copiously studied tradition of English constitutional conservatism which leads through Burke and Hume into the great conservative political and constitutional historians of the nineteenth century: Macaulay, Stubbs, Green and Maitland. This is the tradition which issues in our own day in conservatives such as Marriott, Keith, Amery, Hogg and Churchill. Lord Percy of Newcastle, no newcomer to the study of conservative thought, has recently shown the Anglo-American tradition of theocratic Protestantism can be integrated with conservative constitutional historicism and distinguished from what Lord Percy calls the "totalist heresy" of democracy. All this is excluded from Kirk's conservative view, though certainly Kirk, Burke, English constitutional conservatism, and Lord Percy will have a special ideological

kinship. Kirk seems to have performed a fatal lobotomy on the conservative mind in depriving it of its seat of moral judgments in constitutional conservatism.

Equally debilitating is his decision to treat the Burkean tradition apart from conservative idealism and sociology. Burke, together with his contemporary continental conservatives, furnished crucial ingredients for early sociology in drawing attention to the role of non-rational elements in human affairs. But Kirk cannot include the conservative sociological tradition without reference to its genesis before Burke in the defenders of the *ancien regime* and its issue after Burke in the social Darwinists. Though mutually antithetical, both movements showed strong affinity with several of Burke's leading ideas. However, few movements receive more scorn from Kirk than the sociological individualism associated with the names Spencer, Carnegie and Sumner. Kirk is similarly scornful of the Hegelian philosophic tradition, an antipathy which deprives him not only of the support of English conservative idealism associated with Bernard Bosanquet, but also of the idealist conservatism of Max Scheler, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons and Pitirim Sorokin. As Kirk truly announces, he deals with a highly selected segment of the Burkean tradition.

However, even assuming the accuracy of his definition of what is and is not Burkean, it is still fair to ask whether more than that one tradition cannot be justly identified with the Anglo-American conservative mind. Here it is instructive to recall a few of the conservatives who, aside from those above, Kirk leaves out of his account. Among them are Richard Hooker (though Kirk gives him retroactive Burkean status), Francis Bacon, most scholars would include Thomas Hobbes as a conservative, Bolingbroke, Sir Robert Filmer, Cotton Mather, Lord Shaftesbury, Daniel Leonard, Alexander Hamilton (how justify including John Marshall without Hamilton?), David Hume, Thomas Carlyle, George Fitzhugh, Thomas Macaulay, W. B. Yeats, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Walter Lippmann and T. S. Eliot. The last ten of these are all post-Burke. All are names for conservatives to conjure with. But the incompatibility of

Kirk's conservatism with the doctrines of Lippmann and Eliot in particular illustrates the dilemma of the conservative in a democracy.

III. *The Conservative Dilemma*

High statesmanship requires sufficient intellectual and moral integrity to accept the obligation to educate the people to adopt immediate restraints as prerequisites to the realization of greater future awards. Applied to public policies, this is common to liberal and radical as well as to conservative policies. But in addition, conservatism takes a special view of the nature of statesmanship which makes it fundamentally alien to democratic forms of government. For the conservative argues that statesmanship requires the highest wisdom and the highest power combined together in those who hold authority. When it is the people who confer power, the conservative concludes that only by accident would they confer power on the wise. For the people, being mediocre by conservative definition, have no basis within themselves for recognizing wisdom. The people, left to themselves, will confer power on dictators, demagogues, or other mediocrities no wiser than themselves. A wise statesman, accidentally elevated to power by the people, would need to hide from them carefully all signs of his wisdom if he would truly serve the people, for otherwise they would surely destroy him.

Conservatism has always taught some variant of this lesson. This means that the conservative ideology really fits only with the aristocratic form of government, for the authority of an aristocracy is self-determining, self-validating and self-perpetuating. An aristocratic form of government, though it may be open to its own characteristic weaknesses, claims immunity from the inhibition of statesmanship, which is the characteristic disease of democracy. For, at least in theory, an aristocracy could recognize wisdom and could exercise the self-restraining dictates of statesmanship.

Historical aristocracies have attempted to reinforce these claims by surrounding their authority with what the anthropologist calls mass-oriented taboo and self-oriented mana. The chief function of conservatism as an ideology has been to defend, explain, ration-

alize and make legitimate the specifically aristocratic taboo-mana system which removes power from the grasp of the people and restricts it to the aristocracy.

Being in this fashion fundamentally anti-democratic, conservatism, since even before the time of Plato, has had a difficult time retaining its moral and intellectual integrity inside a democratic form of government. As stern integrity is the essential conservative virtue, this leads to a cruel dilemma, faced most subtly by Plato, and explained by K. R. Popper in his own highly personal fashion. For the conservative can abide democracy only at the sacrifice of his integrity, and he can maintain his integrity only by disavowing democracy.

There have been two primary ways of resolving this conservative dilemma. One is through a Platonic dualism which, in justifying distinction between the capacities of the people and the elite, also justifies aristocratic dissimulation. The other is through a romantic reaction which foregoes political responsibility as a price for remaining an ideological alien inside a democracy. The first position is today most ably expounded by Walter Lippmann, the second by T. S. Eliot. Both men have been sufficiently articulate to point out their own intellectual heritages. Russell Kirk's conservatism stands in between these two. Brief attention, first to Lippmann and then to Eliot, will uncover some basic difficulties in the way Kirk meets the conservative dilemma.

IV. *A Preface to Theocracy*

Lippmann's basic teaching, in both public policy and ethics, has turned on a hard-driven distinction between the higher rationalistic potentials for self-discipline, wisdom and leadership by an intellectual elite on the one hand, and the lower level motivation, self-indulgence and animistic thinking of the mass of men on the other hand. Lippmann has come to terms with this distinction in all his most serious works. His conclusions candidly propose divisions of both politics and religion along the lines of animism and stoicism. Public religion and mass politics can follow the exoteric wisdom of the great social organizations of every age. However,

private wisdom and the morality of the elite must follow the mature morality of the great teachers of every age. In effect this means something like Catholicism for the masses and something like stoicism for the Aristocracy. The key to Lippmann's conservatism is the difference in maturity between the mass mind and the aristocratic mind. The masses retain child-like magical animistic projections in interpreting their political and moral environment. The aristocrat "grows up" and achieves a Freudian harmony and an autonomous personality. His environment is secularized, neutralized, adjusted to, but also mastered. He is able to live at peace in a world in which Whirl is King. He is able to be scientific without aping Faust, for the Faustian contract with Mephistopheles is a product of child-like adults playing with dangerously mature desires. In Lippmann's conservatism, animism functions in the modern world only as a political and moral narcosis for the mass man who is unable to rise to aristocratic maturity. To pretend otherwise would be for Lippmann either irresponsible romanticism or disingenuous intellectual sharpstering.

Compare Kirk's politics: Society is seen as an entity more real than its individual members: "the individual is foolish... the species is wise." Again, the "partisan instincts of the species" are approved of against the "vanity of the man of genius." There is a superior "kind of collective wisdom, the sum of slow accretions of a thousand generations. This lost, [man] is thrown back upon his own private stock of reason, with the consequences which attend shipwreck." This immortal accretion of collective wisdom is the spiritually animating reality of society, the fiber which links together all generations—"those living, those dead and those yet unborn"—into a great organic chain of being which is the essence of the constitutional contract in any society at any given moment.

It is a contract achieved not by the rational actions of individual men, but by the purifying selectivity of Providence. So that any constitution *may* be Providential, for it is impossible to know with rational certainty God's constitutional will. This does not make the attempt to know God's will futile, but rather all the more necessary. But apprehension can come only through intuition, revelation and grace. Thus politics becomes the mystical "art of

apprehending and applying the Justice which is above nature." There is no place for the separation of church and state in such a scheme. The state is itself divine and therefore at one with the church. (It is "government" which is human.) "Religion and politics are inseparable. . . . The Church lives . . . not merely in partnership with the state, but with it constitutes a unity. . . . At bottom, Church and State are forever united." The basic futility in separating church and state follows from the fact that all "real" law is natural law. Positive legislation is merely fallible approximation. "All human laws are, properly speaking, only declaratory; they may alter the mode and application, but have no power over the substance of original justice."

How can we know this divine justice? Again, revelation rather than reason is the basic method. Assuming God approves of what He has preserved, most anything antiquated may be confidently revered as a likely repository of divine will. It is because of this immortal divine essence animating the prescriptive institutions of society that rationalistic tinkering with society is wrong. More than wrong, it is a blasphemous assault on divinity. Revolution is institutional crucifixion.

Just as society's formal institutions are protected from rationalistic tinkering, so are society's natural leaders—its aristocracy—protected from displacement. They are the only repositories of "Prudence." Prudence is not intellectual reason, but rather intuitive wisdom suffused with divine revelation. It consists of "Principles" rather than anathematized abstractions. Principle is good theological dogmatism. Abstraction is bad scientific fallibility.

This is the theoretical essence of Kirk's new conservative politics. And though he has great affinity with the nineteenth-century English Romanticism, he has written *A Program for Conservatives* as an attempt to deny that his conservatism is politically irresponsible. Yet it is sharply distinguishable from Lippmann's conservatism, for it could not take in Lippmann without implying that its own dogma is Platonic "noble lie." Despite Kirk's frequent disclaimer of "political Christianity" (the use of mass religiosity to achieve the private ends of an elite), this remains a recurring query

about his work even though sentiments kindred to his own raise no such questions in the conservatism of T. S. Eliot.

V. *The Eternal Thomism*

In the first place, considerations of political responsibility do not arise for Eliot. He is a self-declared alien in the modern world, reminiscing about cultural animism, mythopoetry and theocracy and setting his bearings steadily on the late sixteenth-century metaphysical Elizabethans who made the last English stand against the encroachments of the modern prosaic and scientific world. And indeed, it is true that the Elizabethan Hooker, following St. Thomas, made an animistic view of politics philosophically intelligible. Burke, it is furthermore true, talks in this same fashion. But Burke never attempted philosophic intelligibility. Indeed, Burke, who was an *ad-hoc* polemicist in all his phases, has no explicit philosophy at all. This is the source of a serious problem for Kirk. In taking Burke as point of departure, he could not include the type of conservatism represented by Eliot even though the emotional responses evoked by *The Waste Land* tradition provide the seed-bed of intellectual receptivity for the new conservatism. Eliot, raking over the muck of the spiritual leavings of industrial culture in its bureaucratic phase, threw out the entire culture along with the drabness of its prophylactic morality. His search for the root of the trouble convinced him that one could not stop with Burke, or indeed any place short of the Gothic foundations for the type of conservatism found in Burke and in nineteenth century romanticism. For Kirk to give Eliot more than a paragraph meant either to quarrel with him or to change the study to an analysis of the Thomistic tradition in Anglo-American conservatism. That Kirk himself thought of the latter may be indicated in the opening pages of *The Conservative Mind* where awareness is shown of the Scholastic implications of Burke's doctrines. This is far more than merely the problem of choosing a convenient point to drop an intellectual plumb line. Involved here are basic issues concerning key ingredients in the conservatisms of both Kirk and Burke.

Two fundamentals are found in both men. One is a normal relativism which is at the base of what may be called Burke's institutional conservatism. Without this there is no meaning to Burke's doctrine of prescription and the belief that social institutions, wherever they crop up—in India, in colonial America, in France, and most of all in England—develop a kind of intrinsic self-validation beyond human judgment. This indiscriminating institutional conservatism is quite similar to the value-free relativism of the anthropologist who wishes to treasure and preserve every primitive institution simply for its own sake, denying the validity of Western value-judgments about primitive customs.

The trouble comes from the discord between this institutional conservatism and the moral absolutism which is at the base of what may be called Burke's ideological conservatism. Without this second ingredient there is no meaning to Burke's teleological doctrine of Divine Providence and the conviction that "all laws are properly speaking, only declaratory; . . . they have no power over the substance of original justice." Kirk hopes that Burke's "doctrine of Divine purpose puts a great gulf between his 'expediency' and the expediency of Machiavelli." Otherwise there is an equally great gulf between Burke's own doctrines of Prescription and Providence, for one is pragmatic and the other teleological. However, in this case, Machiavelli himself must be called something of a proto-Burkean conservative. For the *Prince* was a pragmatic text for reinforcing the power and stability of the aristocracy against subverters and rebels among the decadent masses, while the *Discourses* revered the teleological *virtu* of Roman institutions.

There is a more than semantic difference between Machiavellian *virtu* and Burkean Providence, but neither one resolves the internal conflict which has troubled scholars of these two great theorists. Ultimately, for Burke, Faith, the great reconciler, is the only hope. "Even the most intelligent of men can not hope to understand all the secrets of traditional morals and social arrangements; but we may be sure that Providence, acting through the medium of human trial and error, has developed every hoary habit for some important purpose." At its worst this is theocratic demagoguery. At its best it is Panglossian. Yet it is probably the only

way the two opposing elements in Burke may be reconciled short of resort to one of the more sophisticated conceptualisms of the Aristotle-Aquinas or the Hegel-Dewey varieties. But as we have noted, Kirk's ideological self-limitation has carefully removed all these from his reach. The result is a body of doctrines with severe intellectual limitations. However regrettable, this must be pointed out in order to move on to consider the more probable, abiding significance of Kirk's new conservatism. For it is a vital body of doctrines. But its vitality lies not so much in its own intrinsic substance but rather in the way it serves the present needs of the people at whom it is aimed. For this it is necessary to recall some of the characteristics of the New Deal, regarding it not as merely a time span or an administration but as a separate culture with its own integral system of cultural values.

VI. *The Liberal Culture of the New Deal*

The "open culture" of the New Deal's liberal welfare state had been born of virtual secrecy. Its ingredients had developed as isolated social deviations and aberrations in something like a cultural underground. Though they had had a long pre-history, they had known little preceding homogeneity. They had developed largely as isolated *ad hoc* reactions to or left-overs from the dominant cultural patterns of the post World War I era. It is easy to trace the isolated spawning of these cultural deviations: social welfare humanitarianism in the urban slums, lower class organization in the nascent labor unions, pragmatism and positivism in the burgeoning social sciences, secularism everywhere, especially in the Churches themselves. All this was reinforced with a pervading sense of indignant realism which raked over the muck beneath the surface pretenses of everything in the old culture: its business practices, its constitutional rulings, its social manners, its ideals, and its symbolic leaders. All were found masks for an underlying morass of dishonesty, corruption, decay and intellectual bankruptcy.

The amazing thing was the way all these isolated cultural rejects of the pariah elements of the twenties were fitted together as

integral components of a fairly homogeneous alternative culture quickly after 1929. Though it was indeed an open culture, as it proclaimed, still, like every culture, it had certain "totalitarian" aspects in the way it also rejected summarily without even bothering, or feeling obliged to say why, many discordant elements usually having to do with its great cultural "enemies," Depression, Fascism, and private wealth. Many who during the thirties still defended capitalism, conservatism and aristocratic privileges, felt a strong sense of oppression.

Early middle class democracy after its revolutionary establishment had similarly rejected and driven "underground" key ideological fragments of the aristocracy it displaced. The late Karl Mannheim has explained how these rejections later cropped out in the case of nineteenth-century German conservatism. The appearance of our own new conservatism seems to have involved similar developments. For although the cultural values of the New Deal spread completely over our people, they did not sink in deeply.

For most men, new political beliefs are much like any other new style. The mass of men during the thirties were not much more deeply devoted to the ideas of the New Deal than they were to the water-fall modern design of their radio cabinets, or to long skirts and puffy lounge-drape suits. Most men were cultural bystanders. Like David Riesman's other-directed people, they had scrapped their business-oriented gyroscopes and attuned their built-in radar equipment to the cultural values of the New Deal. The Babbitt of the twenties became the bureaucrat of the thirties. Indeed, his training in Babbitty was almost a precondition for his shift to the bureaucracy, for it had prepared him to adjust his beliefs to an absolute devotion to every successive product he sold and every successive firm he worked for.

In normal times it is hard to tell the depth of conviction of the cultural bystanders from that of the cultural paragons. During the thirties we talked about the average man, holding before us the images of Lanny Budd, Ernest Hemingway, David Lilienthal, Harold Ickes and Claude Pepper. Everyone mistook mass style acceptance among the people for deep and abiding conviction.

Learned and well-respected political scientists proclaimed up to 1950 that the Republican Party had no future because it had lost its left wing. No anti-liberal party seemed to have any chance at all, so "coercive," so widely followed, and so "totalitarian" appeared the liberal culture of the New Deal.

VII. *The Social Functions of the New Conservatism*

All this seems thoroughly shattered now. The opposite questions are being seriously debated by learned and well-respected political scientists. The future as we now cast it before us in prospective thought seems unrelievedly conservative. There is a host of new conservative culture paragons.² The significance of Russell Kirk is in great part due to his excellence in filling this role for a people which, from a nation of apparent rank-and-file New Dealers, had become with hardly any sense of incongruity a nation of apparent conservatives and, when it was in style, McCarthyites. It is not as if the new team had been holding back its own special fans, for many of the players and almost all of the fans were the same as before. But during one night they changed their ideological uniforms. The bystanders were the same; it was the cultural ideological environment which had changed. It was often painfully apparent that New Conservative was but Old Liberal writ Republican.

Part of Russell Kirk's achievement in his *Program for Conservatives* and *Academic Freedom* has been to help mobilize adherents against the key segments of the old liberalism. The new conservatism has new "enemies" it scourges with a conscious intolerance. It cannot tolerate evil, and evil is atheism, together with secularist atheist tendencies; communism, together with left-wing communistic tendencies; and scientism, together with radical

²Among them are, in literature: T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, the New Critics, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, William Faulkner, Ellen Glasgow, Virginia Woolf, and those associated with the Southern Agrarians. In philosophy and political theory: Francis Wilson, Leo Strauss, Yves Simon, Eric Voegelin, Richard Weaver, Peter Viereck and Russell Kirk. In economics: F. A. von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Fritz Machlup, Edward Chamberlain, Milton Friedman and Arthur Burns.

rationalistic tendencies. These doctrines, plus Kirk's fundamental religiosity, have served several of our specific Cold War needs.

Americans after World War II were confronted with several shocks. The rationalistic New Deal followed its war-born prosperity into a self-interested shambles of pressure-group power politics and urban machine corruption. Its bright young braintrusts appeared at second glance to be middle-aged traitors. There was needed a doctrine to defend the shift from anti-Fascism to anti-Communism. Although all this awaited political expression and exploitation, both the middle-aged liberals and the Chamber of Commerce conservatives remained inarticulate. Only the new conservatives spoke out, and Kirk's is their most persuasive voice.

More important, however, was the fundamental cultural transition promised by the development of the new bureaucratized society so carefully studied by Weber, Lederer, Corey, Parsons, Mills and Riesman. In its wake there appeared a mass of insecure other-directed unsettled suburbanites who found no substitute for their archaic core of agrarian morality. Suburbia is nobody's home town. Schools did not supplant families, political parties did not supplant churches, and ideologies did not supplant creeds. The simple personalized loyalties of their past were gone and they were unequipped for devotion to the seemingly arid and abstract loyalties of a bureaucratic culture. Sociologists have told us all this, but they have not *criticized* it. They have explained what happened, but they have not bemoaned it. It is as bitter criticism and nostalgic lamentation that Kirk's new conservatism makes one of its strongest appeals.

This helps explain also its antipathy to positivism and the social sciences. For the new conservatism soothes pent-up injury, forlornness and frustration. It serves up a sin-laden culprit rather than an explanation of impersonal causation. Thus Kirk proudly ignores sociology and follows Ortega in attributing the evils of modern mass culture to the rationalism of Rousseau, the liquidation of the French aristocracy and the survivals of that spirit in the New Deal "*philosophes*." These are needs which help explain the seemingly widespread credence given to Kirk's personalized animistic political theory.

However, an even more important explanation of the conservative appeal comes from consideration of the future rather than the past. For implicit in our contemporary revolutions in energy, servomechanism, communication, gerontology and organization is a radically promethean future of large and frightening disruptive potential. Everyone perceives that human culture is on the brink of a terrifyingly unpredictable future in which all our traditional cultural coherence will be rent asunder. None of the familiar guideposts of the past will do reliable service, and we hesitate to take the next fearful steps. Yet everyone, Kirk especially, as we see in *A Program For Conservatives*, knows they will be taken. And though there is no turning back, one can search back through the past for reassurance. Today's new conservatism is that last backward glance in preparation for a more secure move into a revolutionary future. This may be its most significant historic function, and of all the new conservatives it is Kirk who is most fully aware of this range of problems. He is probably right in denying that his new conservatism is an ideology. It is more like an encapsulated caretaker culture to hold beliefs constant in the middle of a furious cultural transition in which "Whirl is king having driven out Zeus."

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Amendment

Though unemployed and poor
I walk in
just as I used to, some weeks ago.
And, old friend, you come to meet me
only a little slower.
Your head is lowered.
Your smile's a moment, and then gone,
as though things are troubling you.
There is no silence, as you decline to ask
if I'm well. Then before I'm seated
you're telling me, again, the apartment's story,
and the shows you've seen, next your tiredness.
Your eyes are careful, we are not
involved. Soon, like any guest,
I find the door.



Rooster Morning

Is dawn;
the new air comes
rained with light.
The cock
caught by the movement
of the morning about him
wakes. He rises
as he always has
and from an ancient stand
crows our involvement
at a yellow east
and its target sun.

Richard K. Thorman

Conversation for Three Clarinets and an Oboe

FIRST CLARINET:

I do not think that he will come. He lied.
Suppose a lion should suddenly appear,
Turning his matted head, squinting from side
To side. Would he, so far from home, be sick
With fear? An absent king at best performs
A drowsy sovereignty. What would he think he sees?

OBOE:

He'd shut his eyes and figure rage and outrage.

SECOND CLARINET:

I'm certain he will come. You must believe.
But do not talk of lions, they frighten me.

OBOE:

His lion is just a metaphor, you fool.

SECOND CLARINET:

But metaphors can kill,
And blood should never be our argument.
Let us speak instead of dumb fish, a sea
Of cod, or fat trout in a private pool.
If all the seas should dry and then refill
With tears would they still find their element?

OBOE:

Salt is salt, its savor all the same.

THIRD CLARINET:

He'll never come to us: We cannot see.
Those who speak in metaphors are blind
To everything but words. I contradict
Myself, and that is how the world is made,
Sixes and sevens, colors that do not match.

A fat woman, her flesh in rounded waves,
Rolling her rich thighs, a basket of flowers
Hanging abruptly in front of her by both
Her arms, like a child, pauses before a window
To witness her reflection. What does she see?

OBOE:

I see, you three are merely instruments.
But what of me?

CLARINET CHORUS:

We are yeomen, struck from someone's tree,
Our sight is not for signs or mystery;
A simple chronicle, a plain tale
We ask, and we would hang as mute as gourds
To hear; we are too destitute to fail.

OBOE:

You bleed too readily. Come, the chords
Are done, the overture begins.

David C. DeJong

Mother of a Saint

My little cockle-bird has become
a shepherd for the fallen of Detroit,
and if my young peacock was plucked,
it is because such nakedness is virtue.

With an opulence of chastisements
I deterred him and took away the canoes
in which he paddled on moon-splashed rivers,
and laid him on pavements to be shattered.

He achieved a parsonage named Pisgah, and
a marinated wife who with inhumorous teeth
speaks a Gideon language even daily
among her vegetables and marigolds.

Then how did it happen that calicoed
with scruples and cold with beatitudes
I must sit on top of this Cape Cod dune
yearning daily for a pestilence in Moscow?



Judson Jerome

Poet

Don't ask me for the time of day,
but for the month, or year or may-
be ask me, What is time? and then
I'll tell you that it's half past ten.

Absentee Landlord

From the bug knob at the tail
of a disarmed seventeen
I leave Okinawa lying
on a scrolled sea. Green

are the paddied hills, and combed,
set wet by delicate hands;
jeeps jerk and six-bys labor,
hard beetles lost in sands.

A tuft of dust discloses
some military spoil
to the south (marked off-limits
to economic toil.)

But north, a flooded field
of pinpoints planting rice
gleams like an eye beholding
our noisy, aerial vice.

But never mind. We climb
ten thousand feet. Recall
those scalloped hills? From here
there are no hills at all.

The green worm, purple fringed
that twists on the blank sea
has clearly no connection
with roar-bound, mask-nosed me.

A silver sheath is real,
stretching to quivering wings,
sustaining visible steel,
swilling invisible springs.

Charles Tomlinson

On a Landscape by Li Ch'eng

Look down. There is snow.
Where the snow ends
Sea, and where the sea enters
Grey among capes
Like an unvaried sky, lapping
From finger to finger
Of a raised hand, travellers
Skirt between snow and sea.
Minute, furtive and exposed,
Their solitude is unchosen and will end
In comity, in talk
So seasoned by these extremes
It will recall stored fruit
Bitten by a winter fire.
The title, without disapprobation,
Says 'Merchants.'

NOTES FROM ABROAD

'CULTURE' IN THE ARAB WORLD: 1955

There is no aspect of Arab life that would
not gain by derhetorisation.

G. E. Von Grunebaum

To know about all cultural life in the Arab world, in any one year, one would have to be ubiquitous: and one who was "*hic et ubique*" would only have superficial awareness of anything: like those officials of the British Council, and I dare say the USIS, who attend every cocktail party, reception, exhibition or lecture to which they can get invitations. Von Grunebaum, generalising about Arabic poetry in the late medieval period can write: *cleverness and delicacy of taste, an awareness of nuances almost painful to the modern Occidental, produce fragile masterpieces of incredible refinement but of utter sterility and emptiness*. He is writing of a dead age, laid out in its fossils before him; there is hardly the possibility of any work by a sincere artist turning up to refute him. As for me, living in Baghdad, I may miss, through ignorance or ill chance, a new Cavafy in Alexandria, or an imagist Imralqais in Yemen.

Does this difficulty preclude all description?

Certain facts can at least suggest the immense area under study, in which there is such a ferment of uneven growth. (Even these facts may be disputed: their wording, or the implications drawn from them.)

1) The Arab world is not, as the map might suggest, a large contiguous land area. It is, rather, an archipelago of inhabited regions joined by a desert-ocean. Hence, the Zionist occupation of Palestine robs the Arab world of far more, proportionally, than eight thousand square miles of land.

2) The areas of greatest cultural vitality are Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq. Syria slumbers.

3) Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf Sheikdoms have no modern culture: they have imported artifacts, such as motor cars.

4) The Lebanon has the smallest population of any independent state; its level of literacy compares with that in England.

5) Egypt has been under western cultural influences since the time of Napoleon (Iraq only since 1919). There has thus been an imitation western culture in Egypt, sometimes of high standing; for a century and a half: opera, where *Aida* was first performed, a national theatre, publishing houses, cinema studios, literary reviews. The Revolution has marked a setback to this western culture: for example, Majors are said to preside over magazines; they certainly write in them. There is a strict censorship. Defenders of the regime would argue: culture, that means in its broadest sense "growth," demands that Egypt's economic problems be solved first; then culture can be allowed to develop in its more spiritual aspects. This argument is not new, of course: it is heard under most dictatorships.

6) Neither Egypt, Lebanon nor Iraq is "Arab" in a racial sense. All are Arab in a cultural sense; whatever governments divide the Arab lands into whatever state-forms, there is little local nationalism. Arabs feel at least as much one, whether in Iraq or Egypt, as Anglo-Saxons in the British Commonwealth.

7) While Egypt's parabola of development has been on the (economic) decline, Iraq's has been soaring, particularly in the last three years. Here alone in the Middle East there is a real possibility of a society achieving European living standards within a measurable distance.

To go further than this, and to talk about the Arabs themselves, would be to generalise, as Strabo generalised two thousand years ago: "every Arab is at heart a merchant." A common generalisation is that Arabs are uncreative in the plastic arts. But this would only beg the question in the three countries of which I have spoken. The Iraqis, for instance, must inherit more from the Babylonians, Sumerians and Assyrians, than from the Arabic missionary-soldiers of the seventh century. And although Islam is the official religion of Iraq, and although it is an iconoclastic religion—thou shalt make no graven image, *etc.*—in modern Baghdad, with no tradition of canvas-painting earlier than c. 1910, the Fine Arts Institute (Majlis Fanoon al Jamila) is presided over by a Sherif of the ruling house, and has 300 students, men and women, taking a seven-year course: at its conclusion they will go out into the countryside to teach art to the children of the *fellahin*. The three hundred students, paid for by the government, came from a people of rather less than five million.

Another generalisation: "the art of the Arabs is poetry." Yes, historically; but precisely because Arabic poetry flowered in a civilisation unlike the middle-class one of today, modern Arabic is still stumbling in its attempts to forge a medium for middleclass people. Most educated Arabs, who can read English or French, only read English or French. When foreign novels are translated into Arabic, it is still a question whether Cockney dialect, for example, should be translated into colloquial Arabic—thus shocking the purists—or into classical Arabic, which would give the reader the impression that London taxidivers speak the golden tongue of Euphues.

Literature, to grow sturdily, and not as a pampered invalid child, needs to be read by a discriminating readership; and the writer needs to be assured—by being paid—that he is doing work at least as valuable as the maker of bricks or cakes. The readership for a modern Arabic writer is not only small, but scattered throughout the archipelago: Cairo, Alexandria, Damascus, Beirut, Aleppo, Baghdad. The Egyptian reviews are in decline; and the two Lebanese ones, *Al Adab* and *Al Adeeb*, pay little or nothing, and thus have to accept a great deal of poor stuff to pad out their pages. In Iraq, at the moment of writing there is no literary review at all. The Iraq Government still makes the dangerous identification of new thought with communism: dangerous, because only such bigotry could possibly vivify the dingy Marxist creed.

The only regular review in Iraq is *Ahl al Naft*, a giveaway monthly published by the Iraq Petroleum Company: beautifully produced, intellectually nil, it resembles a parish magazine published by *Vogue*.

If literature stumbles, anaemic, undecided, still rhetorical, modern painting begins to run. Iraqi painting has even been recognized outside Iraq: an ex-

hibition of painters and paintings toured India; a long article with illustrations has appeared in the London *Studio*,¹ Jewad Salim, who visited America under the auspices of the American Friends of the Middle East, was the only artist from the Middle East area (this includes Israel) to receive an award in the Unknown Political Prisoner competition. (His entry was in the same abstract, inhuman idiom as that of the winner, Reg Butler.)

Thus in Baghdad there are different schools of art, in the international sense, subscribing to different trends of the time. I use the word "international" to differentiate this outburst of painting from the Persian national school, for example, which has continued to the present day repeating miniatures of turbaned princes playing polo on "enamelled lawns." In Baghdad there are those who wish to make their art, or the art of their friends, more specifically Iraqi, or Arab. Even Mr. Neame, in his critique, seemed to advise a greater preoccupation with local themes. At the same time, some of the less talented artists have tried to import into painting that *rhetorisation* against which Von Grunebaum inveighed: though this time in service of muscovite conceptions—strikers with clenched fists against lurid dawns, slaves breaking bonds, etc. But these artists are not in the main stream of modern Iraqi painting, any more than are the academic enthusiasts for chocolate-box landscapes. Without striving to be "Iraqi," the best of the young painters, Jewad Salim, Faiq Hassan, Ismal al Sheikly, succeeded in producing work, in different modes, that nevertheless shows a sensibility that could have matured in Iraq. What else—in a country where to speak of racial purity would be insane—can national mean? It is in this respect relevant that Lorna Selim, Jewad's English wife, has produced work of a high competence every bit as "Iraqi" as her husband's: this is not at all laid on, or derived, but springing from the fact that she has lived in Iraq, a purely Iraqi environment, for the greater part of her adult life. On the other hand, Khalid al Jader returned last year from Paris with an imposing array of canvases of French subjects painted in a manner that could not conceivably be called Arab. This, too, is surely right, since an Arab living in Europe will merely block the pores of his sensibility, if he tries to paint all the time "as an Arab," and not as a painter. Painting is a technique; good painting is technique inflamed by passion.

I have spoken of Iraqi painting, not only because some of it is good—competent technique lit up by considerable feeling—but because it shows that an art can take roots *ab initio* and quickly flourish. Drama—of which Arabic so far has no tradition, only some attempts in Egypt to imitate western nineteenth century dramatists—could flourish equally. "All Mohammedans, as I have noticed more than once, are passionately fond of spectacles of all sorts." So Dostoevsky in his description of theatricals in a Siberian prison. The love of spectacle is the first requirement for a drama. The love of dramatic conflict is the second, and comes only with practice, and with freedom of discussion. Thus, in 1955, the love of spectacle has still to be satisfied with four daily performances in numerous cinemas of bad and mediocre American films, or their poor Egyptian imitations. The word "theater" is, in fact, often translated as "*melha*," the Arabic word for cabaret. Of this kind of theatre there is no lack; someone more qualified, with more space, could write about Arabic music; it is certainly popular, intense and vital.

¹Alan Neame; "Modern Painting in Baghdad"; *Studio*, January 1956.

A well-wisher of the Arab world might hope for five things:

1) A well-subsidised bureau of translation, to control, on strictest "Poundian" lines—I use the word as a synonym for non-rhetorical—the exact rendering of western works, and their publication cheaply and well.

2) A government confident enough of itself, and generous enough with its country's money, to subsidise both a National Theatre and a National Cinema. By the second, I mean the place itself, comfortable, quiet, with good acoustics, where prize-winning films could be shown, as they are in the minority cinemas in England and America. By the first, I mean an organisation that could perform translations of classical European drama, from Sophocles to Racine: this with the intention of firing the development of a native theatre in Arabic. No less has been done in such places as Uzbekistan and Tartary, if one is to believe the Soviet apologists.

3) A concern among the ruling class for cultural communication: to express itself at least in tolerance for literary reviews that discuss literary topics.

4) An awareness among the artists of their status as the antennae, not the megaphones, of their race.

5) An awareness among the rich of a scale of values (I recall Clive Bell—am I being ridiculously bloomsburyite?) in which a Turkish delight may not necessarily be worth more than a *quassida*, a washing-machine more than an oil-painting.

Meanwhile, quite possibly, a young poet in Yemen may be writing poems of a staggering originality, a Cairene novelist may be finishing a novel to make *Rouge et Noir* seem superficial. But if they are, I have not heard of them.

DESMOND STEWART

AUSTRALIA AND THE DISEASED OCCIDENT

We are all (or nearly all) stepping tentatively round the edges of the second half of the twentieth century with no clear idea of destination, means of locomotion or even time of departure. In such circumstances the *literati* should be speaking with a voice of authority and responsibility, but are not: the noise we hear is the gargle of the salesman over the hi-fi set.

Against poison, irresponsibility and juvenility are raised one or two voices loud and clear—Pound and Cummings, for instance. And there are others, scattered round the globe, trying to follow; hardly able to keep up with local events, let alone maintain communication with one another.

A recent happening in the Australian music world is as good a blood sampling as we'll find anywhere to demonstrate the nature of at least one of the poisons currently troubling the Occidental bloodstream. A young Australian flutist of exceptional ability who has played first flute in major British orchestras, was appointed third flute with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. The Musicians' Union disagreed with the conductor's choice and the trade union movement quickly summoned several senior parliamentarians to support its cause. Result: the flutist has been sacked, the conductor—Mr. Walter Susskind—has resigned, the trade union leader and mob politician reign supreme.

This of course is the price we have to pay for "democracy," in which every vote is equal and no one has to take responsibility. I insult a man if I happen to know more than he does; gone all thought of sane hierarchy, sane degrees.

The Melbourne fortnightly *New Times* of August 26 this year carries an interesting article on "The Strange Case of Ezra Pound," by G. Giovannini who is professor of English at the Catholic University, Washington D.C. The article mentions a number of pertinent reports which never got into the American or Australian press. One states that when war broke out the U.S. government refused Pound permission to return home.

Another interesting piece in the *New Times* recently was a review by Pierre Dominique (taken from the French Weekly *Rivarol*) of Georges Ollivier's book *The Man of Yalta*. According to Dominique, Ollivier's book is a careful documentation of the rise of a would-be World Dictator whose main achievement was the sacking of Europe! Americans pay high taxes and 5-billion or more a year in interest on their Public Debt to maintain their present rulers—all of which is more or less their own business. But when American politicians poke their noses into European wars or the Almighty Dollar begins to buy into the colonies of other nations, then outsiders have a perfect right to do some research on U.S. policies.

Speaking of colonies I must note here the general enthusiasm being displayed by the press of the world at the prospect of Singapore "reverting completely to native rule." Possibly it is ignorance and not malice which prompts these stories. Until a relatively short while ago the beautiful city of Singapore did not exist. The British built it on swampland. And swampland it would have remained only for British ingenuity.

A worthwhile American publication, from a British or Australian point of view especially, is Captain Grenfell's *Unconditional Hatred*, put out by Devin-Adair, N. Y. Grenfell, who was a top strategist with the British Navy, carefully counters the carefully propagated myth of a barbarian Germany set upon plundering a lovely civilised world full of lovely civilised people. The book had to go to New York for its first publication.

Whereas forty or fifty years ago it was possible to get some sort of circulation for any book at all, today a work like *Unconditional Hatred*—by a man trying to preserve a few of Europe's hard-won decencies—is almost certain to be blanketed from the outset. Culpable ignorance is widespread today, and malicious men get a good deal of their dirty work done free. The people to blame are the *literati*, for refusing to take the lead, to speak with a responsible voice, to BE "the antennae of the race."

For instance, in Australia recently a prominent editor stated that "prosody is subjective" and a prominent economist (socialist) that "spending has been too high." In the World at large scholars refuse to take note of the discoveries of L. A. Waddell, which are now at least thirty years old.

There is plenty of guff in Waddell, I know, but there is also much valuable material that needs sorting. Waddell established that a definite link existed between the Sumerians and the Ancient Egyptians and also between the Sumerians and the old British Eddas. Bedrich Hrozný's recent *Ancient History of Western Asia, India and Crete (Artia, Prague)* gives general backing to some of Waddell's work, as does Woolley's *Pelican Ur of the Chaldees*; but nowhere is there any serious mention of Waddell.

At any rate it is certain that "evolutionist" notions of history—no matter what the guise—do not equal the facts.

Hrozny says the main characteristics of the Sumerian-Akkadian city-culture were:

"a well-developed plough-agriculture; a higher type of metallurgy; the picture—later cuneiform writing; and a finished world-view based on astronomy and astrology. There is documentary evidence proving strong influence of the Sumerian-Akkadian culture on Egypt, the Hittites and the ancient culture of India. Sumerian-Akkadian influence on the far-off China is somewhat less tangible but still obvious. . . . Thus the Sumerian-Akkadian culture became a lighthouse whose rays fell on the whole of the ancient cultural world."

He claims that the Sumerian twelve-canto epic of *Gilgames* is a forerunner of the later epic of Homer. Just how long it will take the literary world to absorb and test this proposition is hard to say, but if past performance is any pointer, probably between fifty and two hundred years.

While on the subject of ancient cultures it is pleasing to note that the Melbourne National Gallery is publishing in its *Memoirs* some of the pictures and photographs of primitive art made in the Kimberleys by the Frobenius expedition to Australia just before the Second World War. (At this moment, other valuable primitive paintings are stacked in the cellar of the Melbourne Gallery. Recordings of a primitive music which has since died out have already been lost [apparently destroyed] in this same cellar!)

Literary magazines in Australia have been lukewarm over the past year. *Meanjin*, which has just celebrated its fifteenth birthday, still has no serious rival as Australia's main literary outlet. The poetry is nearly always disheartening, but the prose, even if it does not make our eyes boggle, is readable and sometimes even informative.

Another of our magazines—*Ern Malley's Journal*—which is put out by a tired group which believes in "inspiration," is unsurpassed anywhere in the world when it comes to emotional blather:

"In the charred desert in which he is walking Oppenheimer contemplates the last flower from the loneliest position of all. . . . Oppenheimer whose hands molded the deformed and scarred bodies . . . whispers the central simplicity of Christ, of Buddha, of Buber. . . ."

Which demonstrates clearly, I think, for *Shenandoah's* readers, that the scum and muck of *Mittel-Europa* has travelled even to the ends of the earth.

From the point of view of poetry the main literary event for 1955 has been the publication of A. D. Hope's book *The Wandering Islands*. Hope is one of the top two or three among Australia's established poets. His techniques and sense of rhythm are sometimes poor, but his matter is often adult and sometimes he brings off a piece which can be recited aloud without uneasiness or stumbling:

To have found at last that noble, candid speech
In which all things worth saying may be said,
Which, whether the mind asks, or the heart bids, to each
Affords its daily bread.

Unfortunately Australian writers are isolated (by their own laziness

mainly) from the live current of thought which runs through the twentieth century. They do not know enough (nor do they care much) about the craft of verse-building. They could not, for instance, issue a manifesto like the one at the front of the *Kasper & Horton* printing of Basil Bunting's poems. It is hard to understand why this manifesto "died" so quickly:

- 1) We must understand what is really happening.
- 2) If the verse makers of our time are to improve on their immediate precursors, we must be vitally aware of the duration of syllables, of melodic coherence, and of the tone-leading of vowels.
- 3) The function of poetry is to debunk by lucidity.

The manifesto would be better if it read "A function" rather than "The function." While it is a definite successor to the original three-point *Imagist* manifesto, it differs from the latter in at least one important way: it is not backed by a dozen or so cleanly chiselled poems; which is, perhaps, the reason it "died."

NOEL STOCK



Edwin Watkins

The Old Age of Arsene Lupin

If the tracks are lost, and every scent grows thin,
Why should the aged bloodhound sniff again?

BOOK REVIEWS

BRIDES OF REASON. By *Donald Davie*. Fantasy Press (Swinford, Eynsham, Oxford). 1955.

This first collection of Mr. Davie's verse is modest but impressive. It is not as large as I had hoped it would be: several fine poems which he has published during the last year or so, notably "The Fountain" and "Chrysanthemums" (in *Shenandoah*, VI-2), are missing, but perhaps he will perpetuate these in a future collection. American readers who are interested in the new generation of British poets—the generation following Dylan Thomas—can now adequately judge the performance of an able representative of this group. Mr. Davie, one should remark, has been frequently mentioned in connection with Mr. John Wain, Mr. Kingsley Amis, and several others: the "University Wits," as they are called in the British press. These men, insofar as they have anything in common, have pretty firmly rejected the sort of verse written by Thomas, Miss Sitwell, and Mr. George Barker, an "apocalyptic," surrealistic idiom which flared up during the late war and for a time captivated an eager if not especially discriminating public. (The astonishing public performances of Thomas and Miss Sitwell are the highbrow equivalent of a concert by Mr. Frankie Laine, stylized hysteria being the recurring quality.) The new poets, having struck out on their own, attach themselves to no one master. One hears about Mr. Empson, Mr. Graves and Dr. Leavis, but evidently these "influences" are indeterminate. In any case, there is no organized maneuver under way, and, now that Mr. Wain and Mr. Amis have built up reputations as novelists, the idea of a movement seems to have disappeared. Perhaps it is better that way.

Meanwhile Mr. Davie has emerged as a critic and poet possessing the most admirable independence of judgment. He has staked a great deal on an improbability: that there remains an intelligent, urbane, non-specialized public, what Dr. Johnson meant by the Common Reader, and what the readers of the *New Yorker* fancy themselves to be. Mr. Davie, in effect, is trying to sustain the civility of a society which has had no substantial existence

since the Eighteenth Century. All that is obvious enough. What makes him different from the usual devotee of the Augustans is his insistence on the central strength, the firm articulation, not the "elegance" of that tradition. He argues very well for the virtues of the mean style.

The mean style, the easy arbitration among extreme idioms, has not been characteristic of the poetic triumphs of the last 150 years. The typical heroes of the Symbolist movement, from Poe onward, always veered toward the edge of an abyss: the calculated impurity and synaesthesia could lead in only one direction. But after all, they honestly and correctly rendered the exacerbated modern sensibility which has no social location, and indeed the existence of the Symbolist movement presupposes the loss of civility in the old sense. Now here is Mr. Davie to tell us that it is still possible to recover the tone of a "center" without discarding all the excitements of language that we inherit from the great moderns. And he is as good as his word. This is "The Garden Party":

Above a stretch of still unravaged weald
In our Black Country, in a cedar-shade,
I found, shared out in tennis courts, a field
Where children of the local magnates played.

And I grew envious of their moneyed ease
In Scott Fitzgerald's unembarrassed vein.
Let prigs, I thought, fool others as they please,
I only wish I had my time again.

To crown a situation as contrived
As any in "The Beautiful and Damned,"
The phantom of my earliest love arrived;
I shook absurdly as I shook her hand.

As dusk drew in on cultivated cries,
Faces hung pearls upon a cedar-bough;
And gin could blur the glitter of her eyes,
But it's too late to learn to tango now.

My father, of a more submissive school,
Remarks the rich themselves are always sad.
There is that sort of equalizing rule;
But theirs is all the youth we might have had.

What one admires here is the condensation: the dream-world of

Scott Fitzgerald transfigures and is set in perspective by the northern landscape. The language is perfectly controlled, and yet it is always responsive to the action. To go from "a stretch of still unravaged weald" to "Faces hung pearls upon a cedar-bough" is to make contact with the different tonalities of *Piers Plowman* and Hart Crane; but these tonalities, which would be exotic and false in themselves, are held in check and made to "work" through an easy conversational urbanity.

Clearly Mr. Davie is in command of the situation. He works best with a conventional quatrain, which acts as a kind of ground-bass, and even the extended poems are usually departures from this norm. He has not yet managed an entirely successful long poem: this may be because he does not readily commit himself to the necessities of a dramatic structure. (Having no vital drama to satisfy our needs, we have learned to expect a poem of some length to approach the condition of a play.) Still, Mr. Eliot in *Four Quartets* and Yeats in at least a dozen late poems showed what can be done with reflective-didactic verse in our time. Mr. Davie can certainly follow these great models if he chooses, rather than force himself into dramatic monologues.

It may be that we are going into a period marked by a further withdrawal of the poet into private life. The surface of the verse written by several talented young Americans implies that condition already: an elaboration of Tennysonian sound effects is the style if not the substance itself. In that case, Mr. Davie might seem more of an anachronism than ever. But I should think he would be all the more valuable as a reminder of how far we have gone. I quote the first three stanzas of "Among Artisans' Houses" for their excellence, and for their proof of my argument:

High above Plymouth, not so high
But that the roof-tops seem to sweat
In the damp sea-mist, the damp sea-sky
Lowers on terraced houses, set
Like Citadels, so blank and high;
Clothes-lines run to a handy cleat,
And plots are furiously neat.

There are not many notice this
Resourcefulness of citizens,

And few esteem it. But it is
An outcome of the civil sense,
Its small and mean utilities;
A civilization, in its way,
Its rudiments or its decay.

And if civility is gone,
As we assume it is, the moulds
Of commonwealth all broken down,
Then how explain that this still holds,
The strong though cramped and cramping tone
Of mutual respect, that cries
Out of these small civilities?

ASHLEY BROWN

WHY JOHNNY CAN'T READ; AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT. By
Rudolf Flesch. Harper, 1955.

Rudolph Flesch was at Columbia Teachers College for some years. His report on the program and strategies whereby a non-democratic revolution was effected in American schools after 1925 is valuable. His diagnosis of the effects and consequences of the revolution is polemical and dubious. His awareness of the situation which led to the high-handed revolution is nil. Not a word of explanation does he offer for the decision of many reading experts to substitute a visual for a phonetic approach to words. Rudolf Flesch oversimplifies our culture and its problems with European bias. It is amazing how simple our difficulties appear to somebody whose roots are in a static cultural matrix. He merely announces that we have but to return to the reading methods we used before 1925 and all will be serene. The problem of "remedial English" will liquidate itself.

Personally, I agree with Flesch that the phonetic use of our alphabet as an oral and pronouncing approach to reading is still necessary. The switch to the printed word as a *thing* to be recognized as a visual unit need not supplant the phonetic approach. Behind that switch to the word as visual thing, however, there were cultural factors unrecognized by the revolutionists them-

selves. The symbolist poets made the same switch toward this "Chinese" view of words, but they knew why. Mallarmé saw the newspaper as the decisive influence here. The press lay-out is more avowedly pictorial than the book page. Under press influence words began to appear as visual entities during the headline reporting of the Napoleonic wars. The press revealed a new dimension of language in this way, and the poets understood at once. But the poets also grasped the corollary of this new visual dimension of words in the press. Namely, that a heightened acoustic dimension must accompany the new visual power.

For years I have been asking why poetry that relies heavily on visual units and landscape should also be the poetry that calls for the most marked incantation. The answer is simple. The visual spacing of units also calls for acoustic spacing. Poetry, on the other hand, avoids abrupt visual units and relies on syntax and grammar to achieve lineal flow. Such poetry tends to dim down both the visual and the acoustic unit in the interest of continuous statement.

Nineteenth-century newspaper format and twentieth-century pictorial journalism, to say nothing of movies, have combined to reshape our entire feeling for the visual and acoustic relation of language and poetry. The poets, as always, made valuable uses of this shift in culture and sensibility; but the educators, being themselves almost wholly illiterate in all the arts, were quite unable to see their way through the new conditions and opportunities of their milieu. This, I suggest, explains why in 1925 the educators made a foolish decision about the visual approach to elementary reading. They were acting on authentic grounds for change, but blindly. So they goofed.

In our new technological culture the arts have a new role as radar screen. Pound's remark about the artist as the antennae of the race has the utmost relevance in our century for the top brass of industry, as well as for the lower brass of school and college. To ignore the ever-growing technical awareness of the artist today as we move through accelerating dynamics of change is to exclude the major means of successful adaptation to new conditions. In a technological culture the old bounds between art and na-

ture and science disappear, and the practical intuition of the artist assumes top priority for mere survival. *Why Johnny Can't Read* is almost useless except as an act of expiation for a past crime. It offers no guidance for those who are naturally perplexed by what to do about the old class-room amidst our new culture. The 1925 revolution in favor of visual reading was a boner because it was based on ignorance of the total situation. It prescribed an exclusive rather than an inclusive approach, and, as Fleisch rightly observes, the result was breakdown and starvation.

HERBERT MARSHALL McLUHAN

SECTION: ROCK-DRILL, 85-95 DE LOS CANTARES. By *Ezra Pound*. Edizioni Scheiwiller, Milan, 1956.¹

Bellum cano perenne
between the usurer and any man who
wants to do a good job

These most recent cantos of Ezra Pound's great poem illustrate further engagements on the economic battlefield. Champions of Ancient China and Nineteenth-Century America fight shoulder to shoulder, canto by canto, for responsible control of money. The title of the volume means something to do with taking mineral samples. It is difficult to know how to qualify Mr. Pound's vigour of mind, when we see him as energetically taking samples at the age of seventy-one as he did forty years ago; and difficult to know how to qualify the poetic capacity of one who has been working the same vein for forty years and yet still brings up new nuggets. Not for him the old man's scannel pipe of wretched straw. At this last hour in the progress of the poem new heroes take the field, Randolph of Roanoke and Thomas Hart Benton, for the principle that a nation has a right to dispose of its own wealth, not be compelled to borrow its own money (from Anonymous Inc.) and pay interest upon the loan.

¹These *Cantos* are published in America by New Directions.

Infantilism increasing till our time
 attention to outlet, no attention to source,
 That is: the problem of issue

An analysis of the subject matter of the section would require a close study of Pound's economic theory and be beyond the scope of this notice. A treatise on the matter is now perhaps the most pressing of all needs felt by admirers of the poet. The heretical and abhorrent distinction between the economics and the poetry apart, the poem is a masterly continuation of what has gone before and in a sense the most Twentieth-Century poem in existence; it was already well begun before half the reviewers on *Shenandoah* were born.

If any poet incarnates the vicissitudes of the century it is the author of the Cantos. A Plato who in his days of freedom aspired to re-educate² a dictator; in the eleventh hour of his captivity to restore a civilisation; still to fight after forty years of misrepresentation; undeterred by the catastrophes of 1945, to continue the warfare from inside the usurers' prison; to fight with words that grow, not blunter with time, but sharper; to launch copric bombs at a presently triumphant enemy; to raise the eye—

not arrogant from habit,
 but furious from perception—

from the warfare to the drab walls of St. Elizabeth's Hospital and see beyond them

Moon's barge over milk-blue water

(who has not seen any landscape or seascape or cloudscape of his choice for the past eleven years); to soar in rapture above the squalors of exchange and federal madhouse

from under the rubble heap
 m'elevasti
 from the dulled edge beyond pain,
 m'elevasti

²"Remember I never got to see him but ONCE, to Dionysus of Siracusa. The chance of getting sense into one man of talent LOOKS easier, or at any rate WOULD be quicker than getting sense into 160 millions."

—Letter to Desmond Stewart, Dec. 26, 1955.

out of Erebus, the deep-lying
from the wind under the earth,
m'levasti
from the dulled air and the dust,
m'levasti
by the great flight,
m'levasti
Isis Kuanon
from the cusp of the moon,
m'levasti

to that visionary world where the values are not money values, to the paradise of European folk-memory and desire

to new forest,
 thick smoke, purple, rising
 bright flame now on the altar
 the crystal funnel of air
 out of Erebus, the delivered,
 Tyro, Alcmena, free now, ascending
 e i cavalieri,
 ascending,
 no shades more,
 lights among them, enkindled,
 and the dark shade of courage . . .

What will they say of Pound's heroism, when the prose history of our times comes to be written?

ALAN NEAME

THE NEW AMERICAN RIGHT. Edited by *Daniel Bell*. Criterion Books. 1955.

This book is another example, of which many have been provided in recent decades, of the shortcomings of modern social science. If modern social science were without influence, its shortcomings would still be cause for concern; but unfortunately, social science is the most influential body of doctrine that exists in the world today. Eight hundred million people in Communist Russia and the satellite countries live under governments that, according to Communist doctrine, guide themselves by social science. In every country outside the iron curtain, including the

United States, governments look for advice to and are largely dependent on social science. There is no room for doubt of the tremendous importance of social science in the world today. Nor is there any room for doubt that the public welfare calls for public discussion of the shortcomings of this discipline.

The New American Right provides a good opportunity for discussion of this kind. The thesis of this work is that "contrary to the somewhat simple notion that prosperity dissolves all social problems, we see that prosperity brings in its wake new social groups, new social strains and new social anxieties. This book, by establishing a new framework, attempts to provide a new understanding of these new social problems. This framework is derived from an analysis of the exhaustion of liberal and left-wing political ideology, and by an examination of the new, prosperity-created 'status-groups' which, in their drive for recognition and respectability, have sought to impose older conformities on the American body politic." The "status-groups" "constituted a strange melange: a thin stratum of soured patricians like Archibald Roosevelt, the last surviving son of Teddy Roosevelt, whose emotional stake lay in a vanishing image of a muscular America defying a decadent Europe; the 'new rich'—the automobile dealers, real estate manipulators, oil wildcatters—who needed the psychological assurance that they, like their forbears, had earned their own wealth, rather than accumulated it through government aid, and who feared that 'taxes' would rob them of their wealth; the rising middle class strata of the ethnic groups, the Irish and the Germans, who sought to prove their Americanism, the Germans particularly because of the implied taint of disloyalty during World War II; and finally, unique in American cultural history, a small group of intellectuals, many of them cankered ex-Communists, who, pivoting on McCarthy, opened up an attack on liberalism in general."

There is, in our opinion, nothing new here. Prosperity has always, while solving old problems, created new ones; and no one who has ever written with any penetration on political subjects has been unaware of this. Status has always been a problem, and the attitudes and activities of individuals and groups that are rising and

falling have always created problems for others as well as spectacles for laughter and pity. A coalition of a moment is not, as some of the contributors to this volume recognize, necessarily any more than a coalition of a moment. The contributors see this in discussing the problem of the New Dealer who, in the thirties, found himself going in the same direction as the Communist. To regard the New Dealer as a Communist because he was for a time going in the Communist direction was, as all the contributors argue, simply to create confusion and to render intelligible discussion impossible. For the New Dealer to continue to fail to make this distinction himself, and he has not made it to this day in a manner that can be regarded as intellectually responsible, has been to justify the criticism. The effort, made in *The New American Right*, to put the same label on everybody who has applauded Senator McCarthy is an effort to pile confusion on confusion. In this twenty-year argument, the man who charged the liberal with being irresponsible, or a Communist in disguise, or with having strong leanings in the Communist direction, has been proved terribly and tragically right. It should be no secret today that a country can go Communist under the label of democracy, and that the Communists and their sympathizers take full advantage of this fact. This book, while attempting to defend the liberal, goes far toward corroborating the charges that the liberal has been willing, as long as he could use the banner of democracy to secure power, to lead the country into totalitarianism and call it democracy, if by doing so he could keep his power.

I have applauded Senator McCarthy and I will quote from *The New American Right* one passage of many that could be quoted to show why he deserves applause. Mr. David Riesman in his article "The Intellectuals and the Discontented Classes" has the following to say:

"Even as late as the beginning of 1950 the special political tone of the Roosevelt era continued to influence public life. We need only recall the mood of the Democratic Senators investigating charges of Communist infiltration into the State Department early that year. The transcript shows them at ease, laughing away McCarthy's charges, taking it for granted that the country was with

them. . . . Four years later, another group of Democratic Senators sat in judgment on McCarthy. They were tense and anxious, seeking the protective cover of J. Edgar Hoover, trying to seem just as good Communist-hunters—indeed, better Republicans—than any of their colleagues.”

Who will stand up in public today and say the change was not an improvement? There are, unfortunately, still entirely too many people not interested in making the distinctions that need to be made if the country is not to continue dealing with the problem of Communism at the level of the witch hunt. The distinctions that need to be made are not made in *The New American Right*. Talcott Parsons is, I think, going in the right direction when he says, “All highly industrialized societies exhibit many features in common which are independent of the historical paths by which their developments have taken place.” But while Professor Parsons makes a number of statements that are important, he does not follow them up and in the end reflects only a little less completely than the other contributors the influences that still dominate the academic world.

Mr. Riesman describes these influences and the condition to which they have brought the typical intellectual:

“...as it becomes clear that few of the causes liberals have espoused have been immune to exploitation by the Communists, the liberal intellectuals lose their former sure conviction about their causes and are put, inside as well as out, on the defensive. One evidence of this is the strategy of continuous balancing so many of us engage in: if one day we defend Negroes (one of the few causes which, though taken up by Communists, still gets relatively unambiguous attention from intellectuals), then the next day we set the record straight by calling for aid to Indo-China—not, let us repeat, merely for protective coloration but to make clear to ourselves that we are not fools or dupes of fellow-traveler rhetoric.”

There you have it, the mind of the liberal waving to and fro, looking for a place to settle, looking, perhaps for a new framework, or at least for a little fragment that it can, until something else comes along, regard as a framework. But this is not all. Mr. Riesman

leaves no room for doubt that the mind of this liberal is other-directed—partly by fear that somebody will point his finger at him, partly by his shifting sentiments, partly by concern for what other liberals will think. There was plenty of room in 1940 and later for the view that the Communists were just as much of a threat to civilization as the Nazis. There was plenty of room for the view that a balance of power policy was the only policy that would serve the interests of the civilized world. There was plenty of room for argument against either extreme isolation or extreme intervention, for argument against any policy which called for putting the hopes of the world on either side. There was no effort on the part of the liberals to give the country the chance to consider such arguments. On the contrary, the liberals used their power to the limit to keep the country in the dark, and they succeeded.

It is no wonder that the Communists and the fellow travelers have had their way. They have had a framework and a host of dupes that helped them support it; they have known what they were doing, and they have had the courage to do it. It is no wonder that the anti-Communists have had influence only when time in the shape of events has come to their aid. It is a wonder that they have seen the true nature of events as clearly as they have. There have been no great cohesive forces working to discipline and unify them. They have not had the backing of billions of federal money, of the wealthiest foundations, or the disposal of strategic positions in the opinion-making world. They have had no sympathetic critical aid and moral support from the intellectual world. The country wanted the bounties that the liberals offered out of the federal treasury and the question whether the bounties would in time inevitably bring with them the worst forms of totalitarianism, the liberals refused to consider. It is impossible to take seriously current liberal moaning over the excesses of nationalism and threats to civil liberties. They have done all they could to create both.

In every important case during the last twenty years in which the liberals and the conservatives have come into opposition, the liberals have won, only to discover later that what they have won is something they did not want. The term conservative has at times seemed to be little more than a label for a collection of

pathologies. The conservatives often have been more opposed to each other than to the liberals. The habit of language called for the use of the term intellectual to designate what went on in the heads of liberals and conservatives; but nothing could be clearer than that this activity was little more than a species of emoting, that neither liberals nor conservatives had much understanding of what they were doing.

It could be argued from the action of many former members of the Communist Party that the Communists also did not know what they were about; but they knew at least well enough to continue year after year creating events, creating facts which the rest of the world gaped at and accepted as expressions of the will of God, or of the people, or of the nature of things. The social scientist, anxiously covering himself with the shield of science, solemnly observed these facts, and recorded and analyzed and studied them as having somehow emerged of necessity from the womb of time. His observations and recordings and analyses and studies made less sense than the speculations of the medicine man in a primitive society on the question how babies are got.

The New American Right barely mentions the most important conservative thinking of recent decades, namely that of Russell Kirk. It is, I repeat, important only as evidence of the condition of social science in the United States. The seven contributors, from Mr. Bell in his introductory chapter, in which he says, obviously incorrectly, "this is not a book about Senator McCarthy," and Richard Hofstadter in his ambiguously titled "Pseudo-Conservative Revolt," through Peter Viereck on the "Revolt against the Elite" and Talcott Parsons on "Social Strains," to Seymour Martin Lipset in his "Sources of the Radical Right" give evidence that they are not completely other-directed. But we wonder, and we are grateful that we are still permitted to express our wonder in public, whether the appeal to tradition which most of the authors make—along with Mr. Riesman and Mr. Glazer—is a consequence of direction that has emanated from Senator McCarthy. In our opinion, any influence, whether that of Senator McCarthy or any other, that can move the social scientist to concern himself seri-

ously with the American tradition, and the western tradition from which it stems, deserves to be cherished and cultivated.

But while this would help it would not be enough. The tradition is large, contains some of just about everything that can be imagined, and can be used to justify almost anything. The real trouble is with the notion of social science developed on the model of physical science, and of "working" as a test of validity. Too many of our social scientists have forgotten that the concentration camps of the Nazis and the purges and liquidations of the Communists also "worked."

W. T. COUCH



ADDENDUM

The *Pound Newsletter* will complete its scheduled ten issues this May and will cease publication, according to editor John Edwards.

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